

MSU-NORTHERN OPENS BIOFUELS LAB

By The Associated Press

HAVRE (AP) — Montana State-Northern's new organic fuel and lubricant testing lab will be instrumental in increasing the use of alternative fuels, state officials said.

"It sends a signal to the rest of the state, it sends a signal to the rest of the country and the rest of the world. We will grow, produce and consume our own fuel domestically," Gov. Brian Schweitzer said Thursday.

Schweitzer was one of several speakers at an open house for the new ASTM Certification Lab and the Kiewit Oil Lab at Northern — labs which can test organic fuel and lubricants and certify that they meet the standards set by ASTM International, formerly known as the American Society for Testing and Materials.

Northern's lab allows a 16-step process to test the quality of fuels and lubricants. It includes equipment donated by companies including Kiewit Construction Co., one of the largest construction companies in the nation, and purchased with a special appropriation made by the state Legislature.

"This is one of the public-private partnerships that will continue to move Montana forward," said Montana Department of Commerce Director Tony Preite.

Schweitzer said Northern's lab will help people produce their own fuel, much like the early farmers raised their own feed for their horses which helped plant, harvest and transport the crops.

But, he said, there has to be a way to make sure the fuel meets proper standards before a farmer puts it into a \$300,000 tractor.

People will be able to send the samples to Northern for testing and the results will be posted on a Web site the university is developing.

Northern's labs are already in use, including doing work for Peaks & Prairies LLC in Malta, which produces lubricants from oilseed crops, and Earl Fisher Biofuels, which is developing a biofuels plant in Chester.

Greg Kegel, dean of Northern's College of Technical Sciences, said the lab's staff can also test fuel additives to see if they improve fuel quality.

One of the 16 steps in testing the fuels and lubricants includes using a nearly \$500,000 piece of machinery donated by the Omaha, Neb.-based Kiewit Construction that can

test engine wear by detecting the amount of metal particles in lubricants.

“When Kiewit called and said, ‘We have about a million dollars, would you like it?’ we said, ‘Yes,’ ” Kegel said when introducing Kiewit Senior Vice President Lyle Nichols.

Nichols said Kiewit did not realize the machinery would be on the cutting edge of alternative fuel development, he said.

“We didn’t understand, maybe, Greg’s vision,” Nichols said. “We’re awfully pleased to be part of this.”